

THE AMERICAN THEOCRACY

By LIEMAR HENNIG

Some months ago we had a discussion with Dr. Hennig in Kyoto which lasted far into the night. It revolved around the religious problems of the United States, on which subject Dr. Hennig had some very original and interesting ideas. In the end, we asked him to put down these ideas on paper, and the following article is the result.

Dr. Hennig is a young German minister who obtained his theological training at the universities of Tübingen, Berlin, Vienna, and Zürich and who has since been a pastor in Germany and Japan. In the years 1940 to 1941 he did postgraduate work at the Union Theological Seminary in New York and made an intensive study of the religious life of America. With the trained eye of an expert, he saw things which would never strike other visitors to America; and his knowledge of Europe and Japan allowed him to make observations and draw conclusions which would be beyond the line of vision of American students.

Dr. Hennig returned to Japan just before the outbreak of the Pacific war. He is now the pastor of the German Evangelical Church in Kobe and instructor of German cultural history at the Kansai Gakuin University.

His article does not deal with the purely religious aspect of the Protestant Church in America but rather with the problem of what the Protestant Church has meant to the development of America and of the American mentality.—K.M.

THE Pilgrim Fathers who arrived in America on the *Mayflower* in 1620 had fled their mother country England because of religious oppression. They had intended to sail to Virginia, where the "Virginia Company" was offering them land and religious freedom. But by an accident of navigation the *Mayflower* reached the American coast far to the north of Virginia. So the Pilgrim Fathers, who had given no thought to questions of political administration as long as they had expected to live under the Virginia Company, now had to form a government. They therefore entered "together into a civil body politick, for our better ordering and preservation and furtherance of the ends aforesaid." These "ends aforesaid" were: "the glorie of God, and advancemente of the Christian faith, and honour of our king and countrie."

Thus it came about that the Pilgrim Fathers brought to the shores of America not only a democratic church but the principles of a democratic state. This happened unintentionally. They had left for America only in order to realize their

congregational principle of a church free from clericalism. But now they were, in addition, compelled to form a new society, a "body politick."

THE KINGDOM OF GOD

The Pilgrim Fathers' small colony later became part of Massachusetts. And it is here that we observe the formation of a theocracy on a large scale, where Jehovah was the lawgiver and the Bible the sole book of statutes. For sixty years only church members were given the right of suffrage. The minister was the trained and consecrated interpreter of God's will, and the magistrate was its trained and consecrated administrator; and both were chosen by free election. The village church and state became identical.

While France suppressed reformation, while Central Europe fought the Thirty Years' War, and while in England reformation and social revolution were successful only after a long struggle in reorganizing the country, only America could offer space in plenty to try out any kind of theocracy.

All through the seventeenth century and later, a constant flow of people went to America with the hope of establishing a Kingdom of God there such as they could not establish at home: Independents, Quakers, Puritans, Nonconformists, Congregationalists, Baptists, etc. In time they came from all parts of Europe. All these religious refugees came with the explicit purpose of establishing the Kingdom of God in America as they saw it. This meant at the same time that, for all of them, rulers were tyrants, superiors were persecutors. This trait has remained an American characteristic to this day.

Those who had left England because of her lack of tolerance were by no means tolerant themselves. In Massachusetts, the Puritan government was so strict that Roger Williams, the preacher of religious toleration, could not be tolerated there and had to flee. And others who in Massachusetts did not enjoy the religious liberty for which they had come to America from England, contributed towards the founding of Rhode Island and Connecticut. Some of the settlements there were united under a written constitution—the Fundamental Articles—which was based on the faith that the Bible held forth a perfect rule for the government of all men in *church, state, and family*. To this day, a good American Presbyterian, Congregationalist, or Methodist will always maintain: "The Church has to be political, for the Bible is the perfect rule for faith and life. The Church's duty is to criticize the political government and to formulate political principles."

MONEY VS. BLOOD

When William Penn, a Quaker and hence a pacifist, opened up the colony of Pennsylvania, he settled the claims of the Indians, not by war, but with money. Dollar diplomacy is still to many American Protestants an honest way of dealing with tricky international problems. The strict Puritan regards money as the honest fruit of toil. In a discussion, the American likes to bring forth the argument that his foreign policy is more moral than that of other countries; for,

where others would have settled the case in question by war, he is proud of having done it by paying a certain sum of money.

Even the Lend-Lease Bill can be traced to this spirit. The acquisition of parts of the British Empire by paying England with the delivery of weapons practically obviates any argument in the eyes of an American. If something is paid for—there can no longer be any moral objection. To the American, money politics seem somehow nearer to the Kingdom of God than power politics. Better some dirt attached to money than blood to human hands. The overwhelming of a minority by money will evoke only unconvincing criticism, but the use of force arouses the American to the utmost—when someone else uses it. The American Protestant even has an uneasy conscience when he uses force himself.

THE GREAT AWAKENING

Before the "United States" could evolve from the individual colonies, one more thing was needed: a comprehensive religious movement which went beyond the border lines of the thirteen colonies and which would help them to experience the fact that they were not so many little Kingdoms of God in America but the one great and spiritually independent American theocracy. In 1733 there began in the Connecticut valley the "Great Awakening" and the travels up and down the country of revivalist preachers like George Whitefield. Practically every day he preached at another place—and the Americans learned for the first time to think of America as a whole. It had never happened before that someone had come from Georgia all the way up to Boston and even farther north to Maine, and as far into the interior as Northampton.

The "Great Awakening" ended, if a year can be fixed, in 1760. Sixteen years later the War of Independence broke out. Its driving forces had, one way or another, passed through the spiritual baptism of the Great Awakening.

Down to the Mormons and the erection of their state of Utah, most of the Ameri-

can states were founded as new enterprises with the purpose of establishing a free religious theocracy. Of course, the founding of the different American states can be described in many terms. But most of them, especially the first thirteen, were founded with some strongly expressed religious tendency. It does not change matters if this tendency was separation of church and state, since even this tenet was set as a goal of religious, not secular-political, interest.

TWO ARGUMENTS

Now it becomes clear to us why an American must be convinced that his enemy denies religious freedom and is a tyrant. It is almost hopeless to try to convince an American, even a well-educated American, that people in Europe, say for instance now in Germany, have freely chosen their leaders and enjoy freedom of religion. He will not believe you, because it is part of his historical and political training that he himself stands for a kind of Kingdom of God, and that therefore his enemy is an oppressor of all liberties. The reasons for the American Government to pick out an enemy are purely political or economic. But such reasons are never quite sufficient for an American to take up arms. His enemy must necessarily also be the denier of religious freedom. Hence Roosevelt was quite consistent when he tried to convince his countrymen that the Soviet constitution guaranteed religious liberty whereas Germany was going to establish a religion with *Mein Kampf* as the Bible and a sword on the altar.

Here you have the reason why all propaganda directed at America will fail which does not take into consideration that, fundamentally speaking, America is still a religious theocracy. Listen to any successful American speaker. He will invariably have two arguments: economics and religion. With his economic argument he will prove that America must help England to control the seven seas, otherwise the American standard of living will be a thing of the past. And with his religious argument he will prove

that America has a duty toward the whole world to save religious freedom. He may modulate this theme and, if a Jew, he may speak not so much about Christianity but merely say "religious freedom" instead of "Christianity."

MORAL GUIDANCE

America had no moral or spiritual guidance other than the Church. Americans came from every part of Europe. A good many came not because of religious oppression at home but because of "oppression" on the part of their fathers or teachers. They did not come into a state with ancient, well-established social rules, but into a new society. Thus the Church necessarily became the foremost *moral* force in the country. This is one of the reasons why American Protestantism is in the first place a moral and social movement. Or, if that is overemphasized, we may say: American Protestantism always looks to the moral and social implications of Christianity.

Continental European preaching is far more spiritual. A European attending an American church is always surprised at hearing so much polemics and what he would call "political" sermons. He would be surprised at the small amount of Biblical or dogmatic content. But to address themselves to the moral necessities of the times has always been the avowed first duty of many American ministers. Whether you listen to the average sermon today or read one that is two centuries old, you are apt to think: Is this Christianity? Well, it is, but is it not surprisingly close to plain moralism?

But don't be surprised. Because of its flexibility, American Protestantism has always been exceedingly well able to discover the special moral or social needs of its time; and by this close contact with good and evil in the country it has always managed to shape the national conscience. The moral emphasis had to be strong in a country in which no other moral force to speak of was in existence. It must be added, however, that the division of American Protestantism into

many different denominations has at all times left sufficient room for purely non-moralistic, genuinely religious preaching.

The situation in Europe was originally very similar. From the fifth down to the twelfth century the Church had to be, and was, largely an educational moralistic institution. The more the state in Europe took over the duty of being the moral watchman and the conscience of the nation, the more was the Church enabled and forced to cling to religion itself and to influence consciences through religion rather than through the substitute of morals. America in its moral-religious development is still where Europe was several centuries ago. In other words: America is still too close to the fundamental task of forming a new nation, a new society out of the great migrations.

CONSCIENTIOUS OBJECTORS

Some of my most lively discussions with theologians in America centered around this point of whether the Church had to draw the moral implications of its message. I maintained the view of Continental theology, namely, that the Church should stick strictly to its business of religious preaching. By doing so, the conscience of men will inevitably be sharpened, so that each in his vocation may see what he must do as a Christian. The Americans, on the other hand, maintained: The Church must tell the people what it means to be a Christian. It must point out the practical applications; it even has the right to censor the Government. American Protestantism is very consistent in this attitude. Some Churches maintain their lobbyists in Washington in order to influence Congressmen. The "Federal Council of Churches of Christ in America" frequently convokes consulting bodies which make direct proposals in connection with new laws or even press the Government for necessary new laws.

The most exciting example was the new draft law, promulgated in August 1940. The Churches were not only able to achieve the legal permission of conscien-

tious objection to combatant participation in war; they even succeeded in obtaining a far more liberal draft law than that of England, a country abounding in pacifists. For in America it is possible to object to participation in war even if you do not belong to one of the recognized pacifist organizations or denominations such as the Quakers. Anyone may lawfully pronounce himself a conscientious objector. In addition to this, the Churches soon formed committees for the consultation and defense of such conscientious objectors. Even the many Churches which, according to their official dogma, are nonpacifist, have maintained in public pronouncements the right of their members to decide for themselves, even against the dogma of their respective churches. By now all the leading American Protestant Churches have adopted resolutions which proclaim the right of their individual members to register themselves as conscientious objectors.

CHURCH AND POLITICS

Even in Versailles, the true American Protestants were looking for the Kingdom of God. To "make the world safe for democracy" is a political slogan, but to the average American it contains far more. Even if he is not an active Christian, he has in himself the spiritual heritage of his fathers. Christianity is never just a religion, and politics are never just politics. One of the strongest objections against Lindbergh has always been that his program was nihilistic and pessimistic—because it contained no sort of Utopian or theocratic reasoning. No wonder, for his father was a Lutheran Swede, not a Calvinistic theocrat.

In early times, Christianity did not always mean democracy to the American. Fundamentally speaking, theocratic thinking is applicable to various kinds of government. Cotton Mather, for instance, the spiritual guide of early Massachusetts, claimed that not democracy but aristocracy was the most Christian form of government. "Democracy," he wrote, "I do not conserve that God did ordeyne as a fit government eyther for the church

or commonwealth. If the people be governors, who shall be governed? As for monarchy and aristocracy, they are both of them clearly approved, and directed in scripture . . . Endeavour after a theocracy as near as might be, to that which was the glory of Israel, the peculiar people . . . Assist the magistrates in checking the dangerous drift towards a democratic organization of church and state."

Whether aristocracy or democracy: American Protestantism has always been convinced that the form of its government was the most scriptural form of government possible.

HOW TO BECOME PRESIDENT

Even today, conceptions of godliness are of extreme importance in political elections, especially in connection with the presidential campaign. During the months preceding the election in 1940, Willkie managed now and again to be photographed shaking hands with the pastor of the church he visited that particular Sunday during his campaign travels; and Roosevelt was careful to be seen in church with his mother or his son and to be photographed there as well. Al Smith lost the presidential campaign against Herbert Hoover in 1928, and one of the chief reasons for his failure was his handicap of being a Catholic. It is an unwritten law in America that the President has to be a Protestant.

Of course, both 1940 candidates for the presidency closed their election campaign with special reference to God. Roosevelt, as usual, by far outdid Wendell Willkie. For it was on Saturday night, the eve of the election, that he gave his best campaigning speech. In a very few words he appealed over the radio to everyone to vote the next day. He purposely said not a single word in his own favor and did not ask people to vote for him. But then he changed his tone and said in a quiet, fatherly manner: "And now may I read you an old prayer I found in one of our old prayer books?" And he read in a calm, solemn voice a prayer whose content was beautiful and

absolutely noncontroversial. When he had finished reading, he said no more. But he won. He won with such a small margin that it is a safe assumption to say that this last speech won over to his side all those who were still undecided. This last speech, this simple prayer over the radio, was so impressive that the Willkie followers had to admit: it was too late to outdo Roosevelt this time.

There can be little doubt that Roosevelt is well aware of the particular way of American theocratic thinking, and his use of Christian phraseology is a shrewd political method. He never forgets to remind his country and the world of the fact that the first duty and obligation of the Western Hemisphere is always to help God make mankind as decent as America. The "manifest destiny" of America to construct a better world has always been understood as a semireligious destiny. And Roosevelt never forgets this. Not much appeared in the papers about the Atlantic meeting between Churchill and Roosevelt, and even less in the newsreels. But you could certainly read about the "beautiful worship" they had on board, and you even saw Roosevelt singing "Onward Christian soldiers."

BELIEF IN PROGRESS

One of the important factors in the shaping of American Protestantism was the very strong influence of contemporary thought upon it. As positivistic trends gained ground in many churches, the doctrine of original sin was pushed more and more into the background. The old missionary zeal of the fathers to convert the heathen and to erect a Kingdom of God in America gained new impulse through the belief in the ultimate goodness of Man. Jesus became the leader to a better life and a better society. He lost in importance as a savior. Mankind was no longer considered to be fundamentally corrupted by original sin.

For the last hundred years, American Protestantism as a whole—in spite of many exceptions—has believed in progress, in the gradual approach of the Kingdom of God. It is the influence of

a Jean Jacques Rousseau, painted over with American Protestant colors and accommodated to the "American dream."

Eighteenth-century deism convinced people in America that somehow they had to assist God in His sovereignty. And was it a mere coincidence? The belief in the unchallenged sovereignty of the King of England waned, and the War of Independence was fought. The English king lost his colony, but the Kingdom of God in America became even better established in the ideals and hearts of the people. American Protestantism, in contrast to the King of England, allowed its faithful to share in God's management of the world. The American was proud to know that God expected and was depending on the co-operation of America.

EMERSON'S PHILOSOPHY

Whereas the discovery of the "laws of Nature" and the "rights of Man" as well as nineteenth-century naturalism brought forth a rise of anti-Christian positivism in Europe, the American development had a different accentuation. Here again, Protestantism took the lead. The preacher Ralph Waldo Emerson, although he resigned from the ministry in order to live the quiet life of a genuine poet of Nature and Man, always remained convinced that he was the true interpreter of Jesus. For was not Jesus God, having become immanent, dwelling in Nature, the perfect revelation of the all in the one? And is not God realized through us, as He was in Jesus? Is not, the reasoning could go on, a harmonious democratic society the manifestation of the Kingdom of God? To fulfill the laws of Nature thus became identical with being a "good Christian."

Emerson's transcendentalism enabled all America to see to this day in every law of Nature, in all our actions, part of the spiritual world which became most apparent in Jesus. Emerson succeeded in the eyes of many in harmonizing the Christian gospel with the new naturalistic sentiment. And he may be called the father of the modern American faith in the gradual approach of a world reigned

over by love and harmony. You can still hear Emerson thoughts preached from thousands of pulpits in America. He may have corrupted the Christian message—and American theology is only gradually becoming aware of this—yet the fact remains that he is the symbol of the change from Puritanism to nineteenth-century naturalism, a naturalism which did not divorce Christianity and modern sentiment. Emerson made Christianity the religion of even the modern American. Whether it was still genuine Christianity or simply transcendentalism is not to be decided here. What is important is that the American continued in his intention of being Christian.

NIEBUHR AND THE "SOCIAL GOSPEL"

When we turn to modern American Protestantism, we hear the name of Reinhold Niebuhr as that of a theological leader. Today this name is known to every intellectual in America, and in years to come it will be one of the symbolic names in the history of American thought. Aside from his theological lectures, he has been asked to speak by colleges and universities all over the country. I have heard him in a theological class in the morning and discussing present-day politics with an opponent in the New York town hall and over a national radio hookup in the evening.

Born in the Middle West as the son of a Lutheran pastor who had come from Germany, Niebuhr grew up in an entirely German-speaking environment. He studied theology for some time in Germany and speaks German fluently, although with a typical American accent. At the beginning of his career and particularly during the twenties, he adhered to the "social gospel" and won national fame as a hero of this doctrine, a pacifist, and a liberal.

The "social gospel" originated before the Great War. It was then the most modern of the different movements in American Protestantism. As the Churches in America had always considered the practical applications of Christianity, they now turned social, in other words, they

discovered the necessity of reforming society in order to reform Man. Sin was no longer a personal problem, but a social evil or at least the product of social evils. If society was reformed, Man would follow naturally. Looking back today, Niebuhr says that the "social gospel" reduced Jesus to the stature of a leader of a proletarian revolt against the rich.

SOCIALIST PREACHERS

The Churches, becoming social-minded, did everything to create a "new environment," to uplift Man. Today you will hardly find any active church in America which has not, in its basement or elsewhere, its social center. It is an accepted rule now even in Episcopalian churches to have regular dances for the young people—though not, of course, in the church sanctuary itself. In the basement of the Riverside Church in New York there are nine bowling alleys, recreation rooms, ping-pong tables, etc. And there is certainly no church without its women's auxiliary and a kitchen to prepare food for social gatherings. All these things can be regarded as the bourgeois consequences of the "social gospel." The "social gospel" itself meant far more: it meant the explicit application of the Sermon on the Mount, of Biblical teaching, to modern society.

No wonder that many followers of this movement turned pacifist or socialist. Until three years ago, Niebuhr was a member of the Socialist Party. Other ministers turned Marxist in order to reform the world that it might be saved for Christ. And it is a peculiarity of American Protestantism that such preachers were tolerated. Under certain circumstances, a rich bourgeois congregation may readily call as its minister a socialist. The members of such a congregation will regard themselves as good Christians for the very fact that they consent to listen again and again to talk which is contrary to their own conception of life. And this particular feeling of personal goodness saves them from the discomfort of feeling bad. This tends to create a

state of mind which almost no preacher will be able to shake. The preacher of such a congregation is accepted simply as a pleasant and interesting stimulus.

PROHIBITION AND THE "Y"

The "social gospel" was largely responsible for the idea that America could be converted by enforcing prohibition. Of course, there were also other reasons for its introduction. But no other nation in the world could ever have believed in being able to abolish evil by abolishing the use of alcohol. This was typically "social gospel"-minded: Change the forms of present-day society, and you will change Man. To this day the Churches are the strongholds of a limited prohibition in several of the states.

Another evidence of this type of American Christianity is the YMCA, the Young Men's Christian Association, and the corresponding YWCA for women. The "Y" is the only movement in America which really covers the whole country. The best place to stay when traveling is usually the "Y." In many towns the central YMCA is a skyscraper which offers anything from room and board to evening school, sports of any kind, social gatherings, clubs, dances, and outings. The New York "Y" has its own electric plant, and when New York was without electricity owing to a strike, the "Y" was illuminated as usual.

THE END OF PROSPERITY

The Great War did not shatter this belief in the gradual approach to the ultimate goal, the Kingdom of God on earth. On the contrary, did not history prove that, in spite of French and English treachery at Versailles—which was deeply resented by American Protestantism—"the march is going on"? This was the time when American Protestantism stretched its tentacles all over the world, when reports were pouring in from everywhere, especially from the mission fields, to the effect that the whole world was turning to the ideals of democracy and Christianity. The American was only too ready to regard this as

a gradual approach towards a Christian world order. Thus the "social gospel," the belief in gradual progress toward a new world order based on goodwill, pacifism, and social justice, had its heyday in the twenties.

But when, starting in 1929, the depression swept the country, when the banks closed down, when prosperity was gone, sermons rejoicing over the gradual progress of mankind rang false, and even the continuous appeal not to cast away hope in mankind lost its relevancy.

We may subdivide this crisis into two stages. The first stage was between 1930 and 1937/38. During this time the problems at home took first place in everybody's mind. The average church-goer became somewhat weary of listening to politico-economic sermons proclaiming love and goodwill. He longed for something else. It is fine to listen to the assurances that the Kingdom of God is just around the corner, if you have money enough in your pocket and a car in which to go to church. Going to church after a week of hard work makes you feel good, it gives you some "vision." The function of the Church in America is often described in the words: "To give the people some vision," that is, some belief that all their routine and so often meaningless work has some ultimate sense in that it will produce a better, happier world.

FEELINGS OF DEPRESSION

Such sermons become somewhat problematic if you are no longer able to take part in this progress, if you are out of work. What, then, are you looking for in church, what is the minister supposed to say to such people? Only "nice" people go to church. If I have no job, I do not feel I belong to the "nice" people. I might add here that the American loves to put at least a nice, crisp dollar bill in the collection plate. He knows that all churches are supported by the free contributions of voluntary members. It gives him the feeling: God is depending on me, on my free gift, not on taxes. But how does he feel, if he is

no longer an active, efficient co-worker towards the coming of the "Kingdom"?

It must not be forgotten that the American Churches have inherent in them a tremendous amount of evangelicism, of spiritual revivalism, and of prayer. The American is perhaps the most uninhibited praying Christian in the world. I have attended scores of evening services which were conducted not by the pastor but simply by college and university students. They were the same young people you had met the day before at the university dance, those same glamour girls who have such conservative parents. Now, at these services, a girl would pray freely before all the other students, and a boy would speak about his experiences with Christ. The speeches are often purely pantheistic, they are "Emerson," they could be Buddhist or anything else. That does not matter much. Christianity in America is just "religion." If only you talk religion, you are a Christian. And this undogmatic form of Christianity gives every student the possibility of gaining some contact with Christianity and the Church.

ENTER THE CHOIR

One of the most important changes in present-day American Protestantism is the switch to liturgy. People had become weary of listening to sermons about the Kingdom of God being perfect if only the crisis were over. The first step away was a complete revision of the whole service of worship. Around 1930 the service of the nonliturgical churches was built up around a lecture-like sermon and a paid quartet of singers. The higher the singers were paid, the better the church. The economic crisis caused this concert-like institution to be abandoned. To replace the quartet, practically every church organized its church choir. Let us look at this choir: two and two in a long file, it always enters the church behind the congregation and walks down the aisle singing the first verse, the pastor in front. Most of the churches without a good place to seat the choir even rebuilt their interiors.

The singers are clad in robes, black or blue, the girls with some sort of university caps. The choir also closes the service by walking back through the whole church, and it may even sing the last verse of the last hymn from somewhere far away behind the doors, while the congregation just sits and listens quietly. All this is, of course, intended to give the whole worship both a festive and a meditative atmosphere.

Leading in the liturgical movement in America are the Lutheran churches. Lutheranism has gradually gained a foothold among Americans of non-German and non-Scandinavian descent. The Great War was a handicap to the Lutheran Church with its close connection to the German element in the country, but at the same time it brought advantages nobody could have thought of at that time. Many left the Lutherans because they were afraid of not being able to gain a social position as such. But those who stayed became more loyal to their church than anyone else. In America a Lutheran is always called a "staunch Lutheran." But the most important point is that they had to be extremely careful not to have political sermons. The result was that even in America the Lutherans did not lose their dogmatism. And if, at least in the eyes of the general public, that was a handicap some time ago, today it is an asset. If you want to hear a religious sermon, go to a Lutheran church. And people no longer want the preacher to repeat what the politician said the day before. One might even predict that during this war the Lutheran churches in America will gain ground, because the trend in America is away from the semipolitical sermon and towards liturgical worship.

SIN REDISCOVERED

On March 24, 1941, *Time*, under the heading "Sin Rediscovered," had the following to say about Reinhold Niebuhr's new book *The Nature and Destiny of Man*:

[This book] puts sin right back in the spotlight. . . . Its significance: that America's most influential theologian is reversing the optimistic and rationalistic trend of Christian liberalism to lead his

legions back to an almost medieval emphasis on the basic sinfulness of man. . . . A firmer faith in God based on much less faith in his fellow men. . . . The man in the pew is not likely to read [this book] but he will hear about it from the pulpit for years to come.

The "American dream" is shattered, not only at home, but all over the world. "Sin rediscovered" is definitely the best expression for this change. "I confess that between Versailles and Munich I underwent a conversion which involved rejection of almost all the liberal theological ideas with which I first ventured forth." These words of Reinhold Niebuhr are representative for many: liberal optimism about the goodness of Man has become untenable. Although America still believed herself to have remained fundamentally a Christian nation, she had discovered that something was wrong with the world.

The time was ripe for the influx of postwar Continental theology. This theology was the result of the spiritual collapse in postwar Continental Europe, which had completely lost its former faith in the goodness of God-made Man. It had rediscovered sin. America gradually became ready to listen to this new emphasis. Strange to say, the confrontation with disturbing European problems had brought about a much more serious study of Continental theology. The change was tremendous. American Protestantism, at least as regards theology, turned from England to the Continent. And this Continental theology happens to be written in German.

"THE DEVIL IS ON THE OTHER SIDE"

Niebuhr is different from the modern Continental theologian in one respect: he still believes that the Christian has the actual political duty of making direct political applications, to say what is right and what is wrong, although he must bear in mind that his judgment is subject to his own or his country's self-righteousness. He tries to combine the "American dream" with Continental theology: he still tries to convince his listeners that American politics are, even if only indirectly, related to Christian principles, whereas

the devil is on the other side of the ocean. He preaches that America has remained more closely related to the will of God than the rest of the world, with England second. But his is no longer the old American positivism. On the contrary, it takes into account the depravity of Man. Yet in a way this new trend may make American theocrats still more American. For, after acknowledging the fact that all mankind is inevitably sinful, they may become convinced that theirs is the responsibility of checking the sinfulness of other nations.

The old world conception of a Christian evolution with the gradual approach of the Kingdom of God on earth, won by the efforts of a basically good mankind, is torn to pieces. But—and here comes the curious influence of "American dream" Christianity—the Americans reason: there may be sin on both sides, but the fact remains that on our side of the ocean there is more willingness to bring justice to the world. And therefore, even as sinful Christians, we have to be loyal not only politically but also spiritually to the "manifest American destiny" of saving the world. Thus the whole "social gospel" has entered the system of Niebuhr and his followers through the back door again.

EARNEST SEEKERS

But, apart from those who more or less identify democracy and Christianity or who at least maintain that the American ideals "are more Christian, however bad they may be," there are whole denominations and many individuals who oppose any form of Christianized self-righteousness. And between these two groups are those who, since the end of the Great War, have been united in the task of defining something like a world organized according to Christian principles, even if this means opposition to their own government.

At the North American Ecumenical Conference (June 1941), attended by more than thirty denominations of the Western Hemisphere, proposals of the following type were made: "A world

where economic opportunity is not the legal monopoly of those national groups which through accident or prior aggression have obtained control of the bounties of nature." Other solutions suggested were: state planning, wider use of consumers' and producers' co-operatives, etc.

Such and similar moves by the Churches should not be underestimated. They represent official or semiofficial pronouncements of the Churches, and they show the trend which, even if unsuccessful for the time being, will come to the fore again and influence American opinion and politics.

How do Americans who have this feeling of a world-wide Christian responsibility try to educate youth? I once stayed in a camp where boy and girl students, picked from the country's best institutions of learning, were assembled without respect for nation, race, or creed. Among others I met a Chinese student, the daughter of an Episcopal bishop in Shanghai, the daughter of a doctor who had worked in the mission field in India, and a Japanese student who was going to enter his country's diplomatic service. In the summer of 1941, it meant a great deal to ask me, a German, to speak in front of the whole camp about Christianity in present-day Germany. For by that time it had become part of the official propaganda to say that "Christianity in Germany is being killed." To speak about the work of the churches in Germany was in itself counter to the Government's propaganda, which claimed that the churches over there had been closed and that therefore it was justified to help them by means of war to open again.

These camps were typical of American theocratic thought. For the harmony between China, India, Germany, South America, Japan, Egypt, France, etc., besides the many Americans, existed only because everyone had come with the explicit purpose of enjoying the fellowship of the camp. And this meant that this fellowship was there because everybody was in the first place willing to adapt himself to the American way of living and thinking and speaking. The Ameri-

cans present went to great lengths in their willingness to appreciate what the others had to contribute; yet the whole atmosphere was very much detached from reality. Everybody agreed that the Japanese was a very good fellow. But somehow the reality of these foreign countries did not count.

The next step may easily be somewhat as follows: the American goes home and says: "Haven't I seen that all nations can live together in harmony if they are like us Americans? If the whole world were like we were at camp, if the people of other nations joined such a brotherhood, everything would be fine." From this it is only one more step to continue: "Well then, it is my duty as an American to help these nations to be as we are, even if it means war in order to change their political system."

STRIKES AND THE CHURCH

One Sunday morning I went to a negro church in Harlem, New York. In the overcrowded church I had to stand, the only white man among some two thousand negroes. In his sermon the pastor denounced the politics of Roosevelt: "They say we are fighting to make the world safe for democracy. They told us so last time. But we say: First give us democracy at home! Give equal rights to the negro." And he went on to tell the congregation that they had won the strike against the bus company. The bus line passing through Harlem had refused to employ negroes, even as mechanics in the garage. Who had organized the strike? This very church. And it had succeeded. The preacher did not mention or did not know that the strike had been supported by white theological students. Then, after having touched politics and economics, the preacher changed over to evangelistic preaching of the revivalist type.

Another instance: On Broadway, New York, was a little restaurant which was much frequented by students of theology living across the street. One day there was a notice on the blackboard of the Theological Seminary, put up by the

Student Body and asking everyone to stop going to that place until the owner had agreed to give his employees better wages. The matter was explained in detail, comparisons with similar places being given. Only after having succeeded in this matter, did the Student Body lift the ban.

ADMINISTRATION, NOT GOVERNMENT

This kind of social warfare, supported in many cases by churches, had made the Americans feel until recently that they did not need a *government* to interfere in such matters, but that all they needed was an *administration*. However, this attitude is gradually becoming obsolete, if it is not already a thing of the past. For the first time in American history, the "third term" issue changed the whole situation. The former continual change in the administration was one reason why something like the conception of a "Father State" could never emerge. The typical American did not want the government to assume any kind of spiritual leadership. He was basically opposed to relief, to public work projects. His whole conception of the government being only the administration of secular affairs and having only to protect the pursuit of economic welfare by the independent individual seemed to crumble under the impact of Roosevelt's "New Deal." This was why millions were opposed to the third term. They did not favor Willkie, but they were against anything with the flavor of a lasting system. There is no doubt that the coming America will concern herself not only with the administration of economics and politics but with the very life of the people. And this will greatly change the picture.

When the draft law was passed, theological students, pastors, and laymen walked into prison all over America. Why? The theologians did not have to serve in the army, for all pastors are automatically exempt from military service. And besides, could they not have registered as conscientious objectors? At the Union Theological Seminary, out of

some twenty or thirty who opposed the law originally, eight actually took the consequences and let themselves be led off to prison. They opposed the law as such. They were opposed to the fact that in America it should become possible for the state to decide over the individual. Some of them were not even pacifists. They would have gone to war voluntarily, if necessity arose. But they denied the administration the right to pass such a law at all. The government should be forced to remain purely an administration. They were opposed to the formation of something like a compact body called "state" which would in the end perhaps have its own *Weltanschauung*.

ONE PROTESTANT BODY?

It is difficult to predict how Protestantism in America will change during and after this war. It may even happen that the postwar days will see much closer contact between the different denominations. During the last twenty years, many denominations have already united. This process will be speeded up. Many movements within the Churches are promoting these connections. Similar to the different orders in the Catholic Church, Protestantism in America will continue to have diverse sections. But these will be considered more and more as parts of one working body. The churches consult, for instance, with the other denominations before a new church is built so as to avoid the old type of unplanned evangelization. This development will be enhanced by economic necessity. The funds of a good many institutions will dwindle because of the present inflation. Large individual donations will become fewer because of growing socialism. Such factors will knit American Protestantism closer together. And with a growing secular American *Weltanschauung*, the churches themselves will become stronger in their religious emphasis.

PROTESTANT CHURCH MEMBERSHIP

Out of 132 million Americans, Roman Catholicism claims close to 21 million, American Protestantism 40 million members. It must be remembered that only

very few of the Protestant denominations count children in their church membership. 24.96 per cent of the Catholic membership are children, and only 5 per cent of the Protestant. Moreover, Catholicism is supposed to have on its rolls practically every baptized Catholic. It would, therefore, be more accurate to say that 21 million Americans are Roman Catholics, whereas 40 million have declared themselves active supporting members in Protestant churches. The rest, not counting Jews and about 8 per cent of people with absolutely no religious interests, is Protestant in its inclination without keeping up active relationship to the church. These people, however, occasionally go to church and in many cases have their children baptized and send them to Sunday school.

The bulk of American universities and colleges, and especially of the classic American institutions of learning, are either Protestant Church institutions or were of such origin. Even if today they are in many cases no longer direct institutions of the Churches, they maintain some Church relationship; and a good many, like Harvard, Yale, and Princeton, have theological seminaries which are known all over the country as part of the universities or closely connected with them. There are regulations as to what Church affiliations the university president must have. Columbia University, for instance—having like the others its own university church with its university chaplain—has the regulation that the president must be a presbyter in the Episcopal Church.

When you enter church on Sunday morning, a respected member of the congregation will show you to your seat. After service, he may invite you to come to the men's supper on Thursday evening. Because the church depends on the coming generation, the laymen are eager to interest the young folks in it. They invite groups now and then to their private homes, they arrange meetings even for those between seventeen and twenty-five years of age. The fact that the American churches are visited not

only by elderly people and young children is to a large degree due to the laymen's active co-operation. By this the minister is influenced on his part. He has as co-workers the elders, the Sunday-school teachers, the group leaders, and the "minister for religious education," who plans the whole program of social-religious activities. There are dangers inherent in this dependence of the church on its members. The minister may feel pressed to please his members even if it means not speaking out the truth too bluntly.

THE END OF THEOCRACY?

Whoever went to America, from the days of the *Mayflower* down to recent times, did so with the hope of a new life in body and in spirit. The American continent is the common ground on which all build, from whatever country they come. And because they have nothing else in common, no common heritage, very little common history, and because the history of America is not the history of their own grandparents, they love America, the big continent with its railroads and its highways, all the more intensely. Besides this "America," they have only one other thing which unites them all: the hope of a new spiritual life. The hope is symbolized by Christianity and its impact on American thought.

Seen with European eyes, there is amazingly little else outside of the church which is capable of giving any comprehensive spiritual and practical leadership. Whether a boy looks for good companionship or a man for ideals according to which to form community life or to bring up his children, he will find it in the first place in the local church, the YMCA, the summer camp. No other movement combines practically all classes, languages,

and races of this melting-pot of America. The Churches give the sense of belonging together spiritually, of having something to live for, of a common responsibility. No other movement brings into contact so many different strata of society. Other movements serve only one special interest, as, for instance, the Unions. The largest of them, the American Federation of Labor, has less members than the Lutheran Church, not counting other denominations.

American Protestantism is the one molding principle which unites all America. It takes into its care Man as a whole, with his body, soul, and spirit. There are the non-Christians, but they do not have any common expression of their thought. The Roman Catholic Church can be regarded as one member of the Christian Church. Call America a great family with different members in it, and you may say that the uniting spirit is the consciousness of being both American and Christian.

In the future, the churches may gradually lose their importance as social centers. A new American movement may give genuine expression to the "manifest American destiny." This may enable the American to see in the churches something he needs and cannot find elsewhere. The more America develops her expressions of national life, the more the churches will become genuine places of religion. They will become free from the obligation of being the preachers of moralism and nationalism. This war and its consequences may make American Protestantism more conscious of the fact that the Kingdom of God did not originate in America and, moreover, that it has not been realized there.

